



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Veterans Health Administration  
Washington DC 20420**

**IL 10-2002-004**

In Reply Refer To: 13

**March 7, 2002**

**UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S INFORMATION LETTER**

**VA CENTERS FOR THE STUDY OF WAR-RELATED ILLNESSES (CSWRI)**

1. This Under Secretary for Health's Information Letter provides background information on the role of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)'s new Centers for the Study of War-Related Illnesses (CSWRI), located at the VA Medical Center East Orange, NJ, and VA Medical Center Washington, DC. The CSWRI brochure, for distribution to all VA health care facilities, also provides practical information about how VA clinicians can refer their patients with difficult to diagnose yet debilitating health problems to the new centers.

**2. Background**

a. On May 10, 2001, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced the establishment of two new CSWRIs.

b. The Centers' primary mission is to provide in-depth clinical care and evaluation for veterans with debilitating symptoms that remain unexplained after thorough medical examinations by local VA medical centers. In addition to its primary mission, each center incorporates four major areas including clinical care, research, risk communication and the education of clinicians.

c. Public Law 105-368 directed VA to contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to help deliver a plan for establishing national centers for the study of war-related illnesses and post-deployment issues. On November 5, 1999, the NAS concluded that creating such centers similar in structure to VA's Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Centers "should contribute greatly to the advancement of knowledge in this area" and recommended that VA proceed with the establishment of such centers.

d. These Centers were established to respond to the health problems of veterans from past and future conflicts and for improving the care of veteran patients with war-related illnesses. Patients who attribute their symptoms to wartime experiences are particularly appropriate for referral to these centers. This would include Gulf War veterans who might have been referred to the Gulf War Referral Centers in the past.

e. The Centers will provide clinical care to veterans of combat and peace-keeping missions abroad from all eras. The evaluation provided is multidisciplinary, yet focused upon the particular problems of each individual veteran. Where possible, diagnoses are made and, in all cases, recommendations for management of the veteran's medical problems are given to the referring center.

**March 7, 2002**

3. **Guidance.** A brochure, which can be accessed at internet site [http://www.va.gov/environagents/docs/cswri\\_brochurerealdeal.pdf](http://www.va.gov/environagents/docs/cswri_brochurerealdeal.pdf), describes how veterans with undiagnosed illnesses may, with their providers, request an evaluation from one of the two centers (see Attachment A). Once a referral from the local VA medical center is requested, admittance to a Center is determined on an individual basis.
4. **Follow-Up Responsibility.** Questions regarding this information letter may be addressed to the Environmental Agents Service (131) at (202) 273-8580.

S/ Tom Sanders for  
Frances M. Murphy, M.D., M.P.H.  
Acting Under Secretary for Health

Attachment

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**ATTACHMENT A****DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
CENTERS FOR THE STUDY OF WAR-RELATED ILLNESSES (CSWRI)**

*Information for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care Providers Seeking Ways to Improve Care for America's Military Veterans*

1. The Centers for the Study of War-Related Illnesses (CSWRI) have four major components focusing on veterans' health issues: clinical care, research, risk communication, and education.
2. The Centers provide an in-depth examination and evaluation of the medical problems of veterans with debilitating symptoms that remain unexplained after thorough medical examinations by the local VA medical center. The Centers collaborate with each other and with Department of Defense personnel who are engaged in similar health care and research.
3. On May 10, 2001, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced the establishment of two Centers for the Study of War-Related Illnesses.
4. These Centers were established to respond to the health problems of veterans from past and future conflicts and for improving the care of active duty and veteran patients with war-related illnesses. This demands that these illnesses be studied with the same scientific rigor American medicine has applied to many health problems.
5. Public Law 105-368 directed VA to contract with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to help deliver a plan for establishing national centers for the study of war-related illnesses and post-deployment issues.
6. On November 5, 1999, the NAS concluded that creating Centers for the Study of War-Related Illnesses similar in structure to VA's Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Centers "should contribute greatly to the advancement of knowledge in this area" and recommended that VA proceed with the establishment of such centers.
7. The Centers provide clinical care to veterans of all eras. The Centers are located at the VA New Jersey Health Care System, East Orange Campus, and the VA Medical Center, Washington, DC. These two VA medical facilities have strong academic affiliations with medical and other health professional schools. The Centers undergo continuous internal and external review.
8. Veterans with undiagnosed illnesses can, with their providers, request an evaluation from one of the Centers. Once a referral from the local VA hospital is made, approval to be admitted to a Center can be granted. For VA health care providers to request referral, contact Helen Malaskiewicz in VA Central Office at 202-273-8580.
9. The evaluation is multidisciplinary yet focused on the problems of each individual veteran. Where possible, diagnoses are made and, in all cases, recommendations for management of the veteran's medical problem are given to the referring center.
10. Typically, admissions to a Center are for about 7 days.